

SECTION 6:

“The Only Way Is Up”: Hill Challenges



As we've seen, a big plus of the Club throughout has been that, whatever the activity, people can find their own level without pressure. Some people stay with what they like, others push a little or a lot further. This section explores things generally perceived as “challenges” on the hill, a few are obvious, others perhaps less so.

On that note we'll start with what I'm not going to cover. Concluding “Annapurna”, his account of the first ascent of an 8000m peak, the great French mountaineer Maurice Herzog said “There are other Annapurnas in the lives of men”. That's true. In a Club that's now over fifty, several members have faced challenges of injury, age, and illness, sometimes terminal, and continued to stay as active and positive as possible. Believing that we would rather be remembered in our prime, I've stayed silent on their responses; which are better summarised by the Anglo-Saxon Earl Bryhtnoth (trans JRR Tolkien):

“Will shall be the sterner, heart the bolder, spirit the greater as our strength lessens.” (“Maldon” (AD 991))

Let's get back to the lighter side of life with a walk or run of not much less than 30 miles and over 11,000' of ascent: the Welsh 3000s. Almost every year since 1968 we've had a meet where members have supported others wanting to do this fantastic day.

There have been some changes. Are there 14 peaks or 15? What's the best route and checkpoint locations? And the greater spread of ages in the Club we now tend to have a pattern of a number of people running for fast times, with another number who are intent on finishing; willing and able to stay up late to do so. The field for overall winner was pretty open till around 2010 when Geoff Brierley's speed, recalling the Bill Sutherland/Pete Chreseson tradition, gave him a string of victories. Appendix 2 lists winners of all the trophies.



Chris Russell, Geoff Brierley, me in support at Ogwen, 2012

The spread of finish times means those on support usually now work a shift system, as to cover the whole event is very tiring. Also members have acted as pacemakers and companions to others to ensure new people get a good chance of finishing. Pete Mann, one of the toughest of hillmen, paid tribute in the July 2015 newsletter:

“...to Lyndsey Fooks and Fiona Langton who completed the whole challenge. They were accompanied by Bryn Roberts on the first section, Teresa Peddie on the second section, and I met them on Carnedd Llewelyn to complete the final section, having driven round to Two Stones.

They may not have finished in the fastest time ever recorded but they showed remarkable determination and will power to keep going until the very end, despite being

on their feet for nearly 24 hours.”



2019 on the early “Starting Grid” at the Hut

Daisy Langton, Fiona’s daughter, completed the walk in 2019 as winners with brother Josh and prospective member Bal Singh, which gives I think the first mother-daughter-son combo of finishers in our history!

In the October 2018 newsletter Richard Smith’s vivid recollections of a tough but successful crossing in 2017 appeared:

“Ten members of the club attempted the Welsh 3000’s event - a walking group of eight (Paul Sinclair, Ronnie Davies, Steve Birch, Kevin McEvoy, Glenn Grant, Helen Grant, Kay and Richard Smith), and two fell runners (Geoff and John Simpson). The walking group was up at 2.30am, forcing down a hasty breakfast, before being fer-

ried to Pen y Pass by the support team. We set off in the dark and scrambled up to Crib Goch (see below) as the sun rose, revealing a damp mist swirling around the summit...

On descending from the pinnacles of Crib Goch, we discovered that the route had been marked out with small red flags for a fell race... We realised that the fell runners, numbering about 200, were going the opposite way to us, requiring some careful passing manoeuvres on the narrow sections of the ridge. We reached the top of Snowdon at 06.45 and headed down the railway track towards Nant Peris... A tricky descent down the side of the mountain saw us reach the first food support station in Nant Peris at 08.27.

Here we were met by Chris and Janet [Harris], with mugs of hot tea and some excellent fruitcake...before tackling what we knew would be one of the hardest sections of the day – the long slog up the grassy slope of Elidir Fawr. This is the longest stretch of ascent in the 3000’s and halfway up Ronnie...turned back towards Nant Peris.

Having reached the top...the next part of the challenge was reasonably easy, as there are no massive ups and downs over Y Garn, Glyder Fawr and Glyder Fach. [Author’s note: Richard is in the UK national duathlon team!]. That is, until you reach the horrible descent of the Bristly Screes. Here, you join a steady stream of people slowly abusing their knee ligaments and trying to slalom down the loose rubble.



2017 at Crib Goch - One down, thirteen (or fourteen) to go... Paul, Kay, Kev and Ronnie...

Upon reaching the col, you are then confronted with the sight of Tryfan’s South ridge rearing up in front of you. Tryfan...when you have already been walking for 12 hours, it is soul-destroying. When the summit is reached, a debate starts to form in your head – shall I keep on going or drop out when I reach the Ogwen car park?

Pen yr Ole Wen took nearly two and a half hours, the last major ascent of the day...We pressed on... [At 21.40 and with three peaks to go] I looked across at the encroaching

gloom and threatening clouds and urged the others to hurry!

We looked...to...Foel Grach, and could just make out its vague summit. The first drops of rain hit our weary heads. Waterproofs on! Within...minutes, it was pitch black and the wind was picking up strength. We hurried on as best we could and reached the rocky outcrop of the summit...I had a vague recollection that there was a small shelter just below. The thought occurred to me that we could shelter in there for a while...Upon rounding a rock, we saw the welcoming light of a window and the shadow of a door. We pushed open the door and looked inside. A tent had been erected inside which covered the whole floor. ...

So it was back out into the storm! Two more 3000 peaks to do! We took a compass bearing for Garnedd Uchaf and

set off, counting double steps, 60 for every 100m. Stop - record the number on the knitting counter attached to my compass string. Then the next 60 steps. Stop. Record. And so on. Eventually, the vague top of Garnedd Uchaf appeared through the rain by the light of our headtorches. One more summit to go...Foel Fras [which]...has a stone wall running close to the summit, which also gives the direction of descent.

Struggle to get the map out in the wind and rain. Then set another bearing for the corner of the stone wall. Then off we go again, compass held out in front, each turn of the counter telling us that the stone wall was 100m closer. 800m done, should be close to the wall now. No sign of a wall. Head torches vainly attempting to pierce the darkness and rain. 50m further on – what’s that? Thank God, it’s a wall. We love you wall! Another 300m following the wall, and there it is – the trig point of Foel Fras – the fifteenth and final peak. It’s 23.30 and we have completed the Welsh 3000’s. It’s exactly 18 hours since we were on the top of Crib Goch.

Now all we have to do is get down. We tramp on in the rain, shouting above the wind to make sure we stick together ...tired and soaked to the skin. To paraphrase Ernest Shackleton ‘I could tell at this point that the team’s morale was beginning to fade’.

We stumble on in a zombie-like state, the sound of Steve winding up his torch beginning to fray our nerves. Keep on following that lovely wall. Downwards. Eventually, we see a faint light across the hillside – could it be Glenn flashing his headlights? We reach a track with a gate and regroup. Kevin attempts to carry on along the wall – he seems very attached to it. We persuade him to follow us through the gate and along the track. Before long, we are met by Glenn Grant and David Lane Joynt. ‘Are we pleased to see you!’ Turns out they were giving us another 30 minutes before alerting mountain rescue... Soon, we are sitting in Doug Florence and Gail Smith’s campervan drinking hot chocolate...

Many thanks to all our support team, who were up at 2.30am to get us to the start and were waiting at Two Stones at 2.00am the following day. We could not have done it without you!”

Richard mentions mountain rescue: this brings us to a look at several members who’ve taken on the various challenges of helping others in the outdoors. John didn’t cover this aspect in his book so I’ll go back a bit before our period here.

While he was living in Eskdale in 1996-99 and working as an instructor and safety manager for Outward Bound, Andy Chapman (who is a Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor) volunteered for two or three years with Wasdale Mountain Rescue team. He was on around fifty callouts and recalls one of the most challenging - the casualty reached hospital and recovered in the end:

“The team were lifted by helicopter up to Scafell crag to the aid of a walker who’d fallen on Shamrock Buttress. He had severe head injuries and his consciousness level plummeted when we reached him. It was uncompromising, holdless rock and I needed to secure the doctor on anchors that basically weren’t there. I had to put about six pieces of protection in.”



Cloud brews over Lhotse face

Andy took part in what must be one of the highest rescues in history on the Lhotse face in 2011, just after he’d guided and summited Everest. The climber they rescued was severely injured but survived, but had both feet amputated through frost bite.

“I’d gone back up from Base Camp to camp 2 at 6,500m, below the SW face. A Spanish party without oxygen who’d climbed Lhotse had got into trouble on the descent and one of their team had collapsed in the Lhotse couloir. Damian Benegas and another Argentine guide, Matoco,

who’d both summited Everest *that same day* climbed 500m back up the Lhotse face to him and started to lower him down. I went up with other guides and Sherpas three times to the foot of the Lhotse face to assist the stretcher

party. It was the best example of teamwork, every team was involved with people or gear, everyone was helping out. We all slept on oxygen that night – which was great!”



SARA river rescue exercise

Katie Harris married James Bamforth, a long standing friend of the Club, on 11th October 2020. Restrictions due to the Covid 19-Pandemic allowed for a small wedding.

Together, James and Katie volunteer for the Severn Area Rescue Association (“SARA”), both in the field and in the running of the organisation. In addition to hill and river rescue skills they are also Paramedics. SARA, is a multi-role volunteer search and rescue team, covering nearly 8,000 square miles of the River Severn, south of Shrewsbury and surrounding counties.

SARA operates inshore lifeboats on the Severn Estuary, rescue boats upstream and deploys locally and nationally for flood rescue, undertakes cliff rescue particularly on the river Wye crags and searches on land and in water. Until very recently Katie was Training Officer and James chaired SARA’s most northerly station, SARA Wyre Forest, based in Kidderminster.

Mountain rescue depends on all those who support it. Nuala Dunn supports her husband Chris who’s been a team leader with Aberdyfi Search and Rescue for over 7 years. Nuala told me what it’s like:



Aberdyfi SART, rope systems training 2020

“Most Saturday nights you make plans quite aware they may be interrupted by someone else in crisis... The phone rings... The kitchen table becomes control room central, or there's a scrabble for kit, and the evening takes a different course, of wondering how long it will take? Is everyone OK? Safe? Should we wait up? Not that every Saturday has a rescue, but it's the possibility...”

Chris was even called out to rescue our own son who’d fallen from a rope swing into a small gorge and couldn’t stand up.. Quite a shock when the realisation dawned... That made national news, and has given us all a good

laugh over the years, but we aren't allowed to share the photos!

It's time consuming behind the scenes: kit checks, training policy, kitting out vehicles, team politics, fundraising to name but a few jobs, and all on top of the day job...”

Once again, “no bucks, no Buck Rogers.” Further north, in the August 2011 Newsletter, Teresa Peddie described the start of her involvement with the Ogwen Valley Mountain Rescue Team (“OMVRO”).

“I had a nasty accident on top of Y Garn in May last year, I was alone with no phone signal in deteriorating weather, with a head and knee injury, and had to be rescued off the mountain by [the OMVRO team]. I believe I owe my life to the team, who came to my aid in the most appalling weather, and were superb, professional, caring, and managed to make me laugh even in such awful circumstances...”

I really wanted to try and give a little bit back and raise money for the team, and decided in November last year to organise a



Teresa and colleagues present the cheque

group challenge with my work colleagues at Airbus, to raise as much money as possible for this amazing charity.

With a huge amount of organisation and preparation, including five training walks in Snowdonia, organising a bunkhouse, evening celebration, support vehicle and two trainee ML's, one of which was...Melanie Day, we took 28 people on the Yorkshire 3 Peaks Challenge on 5th May and we raised in total £3,002. Airbus then added 10% which took the total to £3,300."

There is a long tradition of many members of the Club supporting charity – everything from sponsored walks, the Offa's Dyke Path, through to Helen Brady's parachute jump. Most recently, Alan Bartlam's walks on the Wirral coast, starting in 2018, have raised around £5,500 for cancer charities.



Teresa mans Pen yr Ole Wen checkpoint

Teresa went on to do a lot more fundraising work for OMVRO, working as secretary of their "333" support organisation for two years, and organising their "Oggie 8" fundraising mountain challenge over three years together with Melanie Day. Even before her injuries had fully recovered, she had helped out on the 2011 Oggie 8 as a marshal on Pen Yr Ole Wen.

The Club took part in the August 2015 Oggie 8 as Kev McEvoy recorded in the September 2015 newsletter:



Our Prizewinners! - John and Geoff

"The Club entered two teams: Excused Games (Geoff Brierley and John Simpson) and the Gwydyr 3 (Chris and Katie Harris and Kev McEvoy). Alarms were set for 5 am and after a quick breakfast we all headed out to the Ogwen Mountain Rescue base in the shadow of Tryfan. Under a cloudless sky all fifteen teams set off at 7 am, heading up on to the Carneddau.

The weather was kind to us all day and although the Glyder plateau was windy as always, it was perfect walking weather. Geoff and John completed the challenge in a fantastic time of 6 hours and 46 minutes, while Katie, Chris and I crossed the line in 9 hours 57 minutes."

Geoff and John in fact came in second in the whole event, a big achievement.

We also had two teams enter in 2017, being Kay and Richard Smith, and Helen Grant; and John Simpson, Paul Sinclair, Kev McEvoy, Ray Baines and Trudie (Mike Wallis's girlfriend). Both teams did well and finished, being monitored on the way by Glenn Grant who was helping the event at base. Richard said:



Black Mountains – In foreground) Roger Hughes & Pete Smedley. In background Chris Harris & Roger Harris facing camera

"What was nice was that at the after event 'do' a guy who was an ice cream man, and had been rescued by the team that year, pitched up in his van and served free ice cream!"

A 2019 entry was stopped in its tracks after two peaks when the whole walk was called off due to appalling weather.

We'll complete this look at hill challenges by selecting three more of differing character – a sustained campaign; a fast solo walk; and a team on a very long distance day walk.

2015 saw five active members attain the age of 70. To celebrate they decided to do all the so-called "Welsh Corbetts" (those mountains 2,500-2,999' with 500' reascent) in a year. This list is another 14 Peaks and includes some demanding mountains (think Aran Fawddwy, Y Lliwedd) as well as the necessity to Go

South and tackle the summits in the Black Mountains, Brecon Beacons, and Carmarthen Fan ranges.

Mike McEneaney took on the organisational side, mainly as part of his Thursday walks programme. He writes that:

“39 members took part in one or more walks, all fourteen summits were completed by Roger Hughes and myself [both at 70+] and Pete Smedley, Dave Chadwick and John Crosby.

The walks started in February in the Moelwyns. There were 28 members on Moel Hebog in April, and my diary notes we had ‘A warm sunny day, great views, great company, a perfect day’ which we followed up with a party at the Hut. The final walk, in November, was Moel Siabod in foul weather!”

We had an excellent long weekend trip to south Wales to pick up the peaks down there, staying at Coed Owen Bunkhouse at Nant Ddu in the July. It was great fun and I particularly relished the chance to revisit Carmarthen Fan, an atmospheric hill I not seen since 1979.

Chris Harris was behind the two other challenges. The first one was solo, walking from the Hut to the Wirral over



Chris' route in light green

two days of poorish weather. He wrote this up in the August 2011 Newsletter:

“I asked if anyone had walked from the Chapel to Wirral or vice-versa, the answer was ‘no’. So I thought ‘why not?’. Looking at the maps, I understood why not, the paths go

the wrong way! After many hours I came up with a route of about 50 miles...

Rising at 5.00 and off at 6.05 the day 1 crux was the Denbigh Moors...

“..the bit I was dreading, the drizzle intensified and the mist rolled across the hilltops. I followed the track to the point at which I planned to leave it and go ‘off-piste’. My luck was in, there was a broad path, but not surprisingly it soon petered out and I followed the compass heading due Eastish. The tussocks were knee high, losing height meant the inevitable bogs and shoulder height reeds – actually a lot higher when I fell over, which I did too frequently partly due to my trying to maintain a fast pace. I came to a stream about 2ft wide, trickling through the grass. Extending my poles so I could vault across, I plunged one in only for it to disappear up to my hand – how deep was that trickle?”

Chris made it to his pub bed at The Golden Lion in Llangynhafael, and then:

“Second day. Never has the path up Moel Famau seemed so steep. The legs were aching, the rain was raining but I was soon over the top... Over Harwarden Railway Bridge, through the Deeside Industrial Estate, I was soon on the marshes skirting the firing range...For some reason I decided not to finish at the Harp but carry on to the Boathouse at Parkgate – this meant I had to walk past 4 pubs to get that well earned pint.

It’s not a bad walk: the main problem is that the paths are rarely walked and...overgrown. I think this is a one-off for me.”

This walk clearly though set Chris up: in June 2013 he and Janet did the National 3 Peaks, Chris commenting in the Jun/Jul 2013 Newsletter:

“It’s a lot easier than the Welsh 3000’s...I would like to thank Red Bull for making the driving possible; one can for each drive worked a treat.”

And in August 2018 he was back for more with on the 33 mile Llangollen Round. He was with Dave Chadwick, Helen Grant, Kev McAvoy, Bill Morrison, John Simpson and Richard Smith. The trip appears in the January 2019 newsletter: they were joined by Janet Harris and Kay Smith for one section, with Glenn Grant as support driver.



The team - Dave, Kev, John, Richard, Chris, Bill and Helen

“After my pep talk ‘no faff stops, just keep moving’ we managed to start on time at 0530 hrs from Carrog in cool misty conditions. The first section of the walk from Carrog to the top of Moel Fferna, 2.7 miles with 1,650’ ascent is the longest... The route meanders along the ridge south of Llangollen, an area new to most of us. The mist...meant few stops for photos and we arrived at the aqueduct in just over five hours as estimated, a moving average of 3mph. Possibly the hardest part was negotiating the jelly-legged tourists on the aqueduct [tow]path. Glenn, Kay and Janet were waiting in the carpark with socks, food and drink.

Upwards onto the moors we reached the Panorama, thus named for obvious reasons and then onto a path looking down onto Castell Dinas Bran, with amazing views across to the ridge we had walked earlier, and rather disturbingly a good view of Llantysilio mountain covered in smoke.”

They lost Richard to a nasty case of blisters at Worlds End and had to divert around a heath fire on Llantysilio Mountain, reaching Carrog in 14 hours 35 minutes.

So plenty of Challenges met, eh? I wonder what variations on time, distance, height and pain will be devised over the next twenty years?

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